

## **Imam al-Dhahabī on Tafwīḍ al-Ma‘nā and Its Opposition by Ibn Taymiyya and His Cohort from Salafism**

Imam Shamsud-Din al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), distinguished for his comprehensive mastery of hadith sciences and extensive command of Islamic historical narratives, maintained fidelity to what he discerned as the authentic early way of the Salaf (pious predecessors) concerning the divine attributes (ṣifāt) of Allah through his advocacy of tafwīḍ al-ma‘nā—the consignment of the true meaning of the divine attributes to Allah's knowledge exclusively. His voluminous biographical compilations and systematic examination of early Islamic scholarship established him as an authoritative transmitter of the theological positions maintained by the earliest Muslim generations.

This methodological orientation, however, encountered substantial criticism from his contemporary Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), whom al-Dhahabī had commended in some of his biographical works and later also critiqued. Ibn Taymiyya's polemical engagement with tafwīḍ al-ma‘nā, which he characterized as constituting one of the most pernicious innovations in Islamic theological discourse, marked a significant deviation from what al-Dhahabī had identified through his historical research as the normative position of the Salaf. Notwithstanding al-Dhahabī's meticulous documentation of early Islamic theological discourse, Ibn Taymiyya's oppositional stance toward tafwīḍ al-ma‘nā has achieved circulation through contemporary ‘Salafi’ scholarship, whereby they have attempted to marginalize alternative interpretations of the Salaf's approach to divine attributes (ṣifāt) that al-Dhahabī's historical investigations had substantiated.

The present article examines Ibn Taymiyya's position and its contemporary advocates regarding their rejection of tafwīḍ al-ma‘nā, followed by selected pronouncements from al-Dhahabī that demonstrate this approach's actual conformity with the authentic Salafi position—as corroborated by other scholars who maintained independence from uncritical adherence to Ibn Taymiyya and his theological school.

## The verdicts of recent Salafi writers:

- 1) **Ibn ‘Uthaymīn** (d. 2001 CE) from the Salafi sect stated in his *Sharḥ al-‘Aqīda al-Wāsiṭiyya* (p. 93):

وعلى كل حال، لا شك أن الذين يقولون: إن مذهب أهل السنة هو التفويض، أنهم أخطأوا، لأن مذهب أهل السنة هو إثبات المعنى وتفويض الكيفية.

“And in any case, there is no doubt that those who say that the doctrine of Ahl al-Sunna is delegation [tafwīḍ] are mistaken, because the doctrine of Ahl al-Sunna is affirmation of the meaning [ithbāt al-ma‘nā] and delegation of the modality [tafwīḍ al-kayfiyya].

وليعلم أن القول بالتفويض - كما قال شيخ الإسلام ابن تيمية (١) - من شر أقوال أهل البدع والإلحاد

And let it be known that the position of delegation [tafwīḍ] - as Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyya (1) said - is among the worst positions of the people of innovation and deviation!

عندما يسمع الإنسان التفويض، يقول: هذا جيد، أسلم من هؤلاء وهؤلاء، لا أقول بمذهب السلف، ولا أقول بمذهب أهل التأويل، أسلك سبيلاً وسطاً وأسلم من هذا كله، وأقول: الله أعلم ولا ندري ما معناها. لكن يقول شيخ الإسلام: هذا من شر أقوال أهل البدع والإلحاد

When a person hears about delegation [tafwīḍ], he says: "This is good, safer than these and those. I don't adopt the doctrine of the Salaf, nor do I adopt the doctrine of the people of interpretation [ta'wīl]. I will take a middle path and be safe from all of this and say: Allah knows best, and we don't know what it means." But Shaykh al-Islam says: This is among the worst positions of the people of innovation and deviation."

Footnote mentioned:

(١) في «درء التعارض العقل والنقل» لشيخ الإسلام ابن تيمية (١/ ١٢١)

(1) In "Dar' Ta'āruḍ al-ʿAql wa-l-Naql" by Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyya (1/121).

Ibn ʿUthaymīn's characterization - "I don't adopt the doctrine of the Salaf, nor do I adopt the doctrine of the people of interpretation [ta'wīl]" - does not accurately represent the historical practice of tafwīḍ al-ma'nā and constitutes an exaggerated reinterpretation promoted by contemporary revisionists who identify themselves as Salafi in matters of creed.

The actual quote from the above work by Ibn Taymiyya was as follows:

فتبين أن قول أهل التفويض الذين يزعمون أنهم متبعون للسنة والسلف من شر أقوال أهل البدع والإلحاد.

Meaning:

**“Thus, it becomes clear that the position of the people of delegation [tafwīḍ], who claim they are following the Sunna and the Salaf, is among the worst positions of the people of innovation and heresy.”**

2) **Ibn Jibrīn** (d. 2009) said:

الصواب : ترك التأويل ، وإثبات حقيقة الصفات التي أفادتها تلك النصوص ، مع تفويض العلم بالكيفيات " والماهيات ، ومع اعتقاد أنها لا يُفهم منها تشبيه الرب أو شيء من صفاته بالمخلوقين ، فلا تشبيه ولا تعطيل " . انتهى .

(64/41) "فتاوى ابن جبرين"

"The correct position is: abandoning interpretation [ta'wīl], affirming the reality [ḥaqīqa] of the attributes (Sifat) that these texts convey, while

delegating [tafwīḍ] knowledge of the modalities [kayfiyyāt] and essences [māhiyyāt], and believing that they do not imply comparing the Lord or any of His attributes to created beings - so there is neither comparison nor negation." End quote. "Fatāwā Ibn Jibrīn" (64/41).

3) **ʿAbd al-Razzāq ʿAfīfī** (d. 1994) said:

. مذهب السلف هو التفويض في كيفية الصفات لا في المعنى " انتهى "

. فتاوى عبد الرزاق عفيفي " (ص 104) "

"The doctrine of the Salaf is delegation [tafwīḍ] regarding the modality [kayfiyya] of the attributes, not regarding the meaning [maʿnā]." End quote. "Fatāwā ʿAbd al-Razzāq ʿAfīfī" (p. 104).

4) **Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān** said:

السلف لم يكن مذهبهم التفويض ، وإنما مذهبهم الإيمان بهذه النصوص كما جاءت ، وإثبات معانيها التي تدلُّ عليها على حقيقتها ووضعها اللغوي ، مع نفي التشبيه عنها ؛ كما قال تعالى : (لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ) الشورى / 11 " انتهى "

. (25/1) "المنتقى من فتاوى الفوزان"

"The Salaf's doctrine was not delegation [tafwīḍ]. Rather, their doctrine was belief in these texts as they came, and affirming their meanings that they indicate according to their reality [ḥaqīqa] and linguistic usage, while negating comparison from them, as Allah the Exalted said: 'There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing' [al-Shūrā: 11]." End quote. "Al-Muntaqā min Fatāwā al-Fawzān" (25/1).

5) **Ibn Bāz** (d. 1999 CE) said:

أنكر الإمام أحمد رحمه الله وغيره من أئمة السلف على أهل التفويض , ويدّعونهم لأن مقتضى مذهبهم أن الله سبحانه خاطب عباده بما لا يفهمون معناه ولا يعقلون مراده منه , والله سبحانه وتعالى يتقدس عن ذلك , وأهل السنة والجماعة يعرفون مراده سبحانه بكلامه , ويصفونه بمقتضى أسمائه وصفاته وينزهونه عن كل ما لا يليق به عز وجل . وقد علموا من كلامه سبحانه ومن كلام رسوله صلى الله عليه وسلم أنه سبحانه موصوف بالكمال . المطلق في جميع ما أخبر به عن نفسه أو أخبر به عنه رسوله صلى الله عليه وسلم " انتهى

. (3/55) "مجموع فتاوى ابن باز"

Imam Ahmad, may Allah have mercy on him, and other Imams of the Salaf denounced the people of delegation [tafwīḍ] and declared them innovators because the implication of their doctrine is that Allah, glorified be He, addressed His servants with what they cannot understand its meaning [ma'nā] or comprehend His intended message, while Allah, glorified and exalted, is far above that. The People of Sunna and the Community [Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jamā'ah] know His intended meaning [murād], glorified be He, through His speech, and they describe Him according to what His names and attributes require, while exonerating Him from everything that does not befit Him, mighty and majestic. They have learned from His speech, glorified be He, and from the speech of His Messenger, peace be upon him, that He, glorified be He, is described with absolute perfection in everything He has informed about Himself or what His Messenger, peace be upon him, has informed about Him." End quote. "Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Bāz" (3/55).

This assertion constitutes a misrepresentation of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal's authentic theological position, as his purported claim regarding precise knowledge of the intended meanings (ma'ānī) of divine attributes (ṣifāt) does not accurately reflect his documented stance. This interpretive discrepancy is further evidenced by the documented inability of the late **Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani** (d. 1999) to articulate the specific meaning (ma'nā) when respectfully challenged by **Mawlana Hasan Jān** (d. 2007), a Pakistani scholar. Documentation of this theological exchange, including the relevant quotation in Urdu with its English translation below, is available in the following reference:

Quote:

"Once regarding the ambiguous attributes [ṣifāt mutashābiha], he began saying, 'Their meanings are known and understood, and the modality is unknown.' So I said, 'For example, I don't know the meaning of yad Allāh [the Hand of Allah]. I'm a non-Arab person. I know the meaning of yad al-insān [human hand] and yad al-ḥayawān [animal hand], which refers to an organ composed of flesh, bone, and skin, which also has hair and contains five fingers and nails. However, the modality of each human hand differs from another. **So, this is the meaning of "hand" that I know. And I don't know the meaning of yad Allāh, so please write the meaning of yad Allāh on the board so I can understand.** But he wasn't prepared to write it. This shows that we can provide literal meanings of the ambiguous attributes [ṣifāt mutashābiha], but we cannot explain or clarify them with meanings known in creation. If we establish these attributes for Allah the Exalted with known meanings, this necessitates corporealism, and through ignorance of modality, we cannot escape from corporealism. Among humans, each person's modalities differ from another, but they all share in bodily nature."

The following citation from Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal is presented by Imam **Ahmad ibn Hamdan al-Harrani al-Hanbali** (d. 695/1295), a senior contemporary of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), in his theological treatise *Nihayat al-Mubtadi'in fi Usul al-Din* (The Ultimate Guide for Beginners in the Fundamentals of Religion, p. 33). This position diverges significantly from Ibn Taymiyya's theological advocacy:

وقال أحمد:

أحاديث الصفات تمر كما جاءت من غير بحث على معانيها وتخالف ما خطر في خاطر عند سماعها وننفي التشبيه عن الله تعالى عند ذكرها مع تصديق النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم والإيمان بها وكل ما يعقل ويتصور فهو تكليف وتشبيه وهو محال

“And Aḥmad (ibn Hanbal) said: **The ḥadīths concerning the divine attributes [ṣifāt] are to be accepted as they have come without investigating their meanings [ma‘ānī].** They contradict what may come to mind upon hearing them. We negate any anthropomorphism [tashbīh] of Allah the Exalted when mentioning them, while affirming the truthfulness of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, and having faith in them. And everything that can be conceptualized or imagined is a form of modality and anthropomorphism [tashbīh], which is impossible.”

One of the earliest Hanbalis to mention the above methodology of Ahmad ibn Hanbal was Abū 'Abdullāh 'Ubaydullāh ibn Muḥammad ibn Baṭṭa al-'Ukbarī al-Ḥanbalī (d. 387 AH). He mentioned the following in his al-Ibāna 'an Sharī'at al-Firqah al-Nājiyah wa Mujānabat al-Firaq al-Madhmūma (7/58) with confirmation of tafwīḍ al-ma'nā being from the actual words of Ibn Hanbal:

قَالَ أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ: وَنَحْنُ نُؤْمِنُ بِالْأَحَادِيثِ فِي هَذَا وَنُفَرِّهَا، وَنُؤْمَرُهَا كَمَا جَاءَتْ بَلَا كَيْفٍ، وَلَا مَعْنَى إِلَّا عَلَى مَا وَصَفَ بِهِ نَفْسَهُ تَعَالَى، نَسْأَلُ اللَّهَ السَّلَامَةَ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ، وَنَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الزَّلَلِ، وَالْإِرْتِيَابِ وَالشَّكِّ إِنَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

“Abū 'Abdullāh (Ahmad ibn Hanbal) said: We believe in the ḥadīths regarding this matter, and we affirm them, and we pass them on as they have come **without asking how (bi-lā kayf), and without giving them any meaning (wa lā ma'nā)** except according to how the Exalted has described Himself. We ask Allah for safety in this world and the hereafter, and we seek refuge in Allah from error, doubt, and uncertainty. Indeed, He has power over all things.”

Some contemporary Salafis have attempted to weaken the above report while other contemporaries have shown its authenticity and accuracy from Ibn Ḥanbal. An article proving this is due to be added onto this website. There are also a number of quotations from other Hanbali scholars in affirmation of tafwīḍ al-ma'nā that shall also be presented in due course on this website.

After the preceding quotation from Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, it is necessary to examine how Ibn 'Uthaymīn and his sect that have tried to hijack the name of Ahlus-Sunna for themselves have adopted positions that contradict those of Imam Aḥmad by his claiming as follows:

رَوَى عَنْ الْإِمَامِ أَحْمَدَ أَنَّهُ قَالَ فِي قَوْلِهِ تَعَالَى: ﴿وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ﴾ [الفجر: ٢٢] وَجَاءَ أَمْرُ رَبِّكَ، فَبَعْضُهُمْ أوردَ هَذَا فِي أَحَدِ كُتُبِهِ، وَقَالَ: التَّفْوِيزُ، وَقَدْ لَجَأَ الْإِمَامُ أَحْمَدُ - وَهُوَ إِمَامُ أَهْلِ السُّنَّةِ - إِلَى التَّأْوِيلِ فِي هَذِهِ آيَةِ، فَهَلْ صَحَّتِ الرَّوَايَةُ عَنْ: مَذْهَبِ الْإِمَامِ أَحْمَدَ هُوَ الْإِمَامُ أَحْمَدُ؟ أَوَّلًا: لَا بَدَأَ أَنْ يَثْبُتَ هَذَا عَنِ الْإِمَامِ أَحْمَدَ. ثَانِيًا: إِذَا قُدِّرَ أَنَّهُ أَخْطَأَ فِي هَذِهِ الْمَسْأَلَةِ الَّتِي لَا يَقْرَاهَا هُوَ بَعْمُومَ كَلَامِهِ، فَلَا يَعْنِي وَتَفْوِيزُ: تَفْوِيزُ الْمَعْنَى: ذَلِكَ أَنَّهُ مَعْصُومٌ، وَيُقْبَلُ رَأْيُهُ. ثَالِثًا: ذَكَرْتُ أَنَّهُ يُفَوِّضُ، وَهَذَا عَلَى إِطْلَاقِهِ فِيهِ نَظَرٌ؛ لِأَنَّ التَّفْوِيزَ نَوْعَانِ فِي أَهْلِ السُّنَّةِ وَالْجَمَاعَةِ يَفُوضُونَ الْكَيْفِيَّةَ، وَلَا يَفُوضُونَ الْمَعْنَى، بَلْ يَقْرَأُونَ بِهِ، وَيَثْبُتُونَهُ، وَيُشْرَحُونَهُ، وَيَقْسِمُونَهُ، فَمَنْ ادَّعَى أَنَّ الْكَيْفِيَّةَ أَهْلُ السُّنَّةِ هُمُ الَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ بِالتَّفْوِيزِ (وَيَعْنِي بِهِ تَفْوِيزَ الْمَعْنَى) فَقَدْ كَذَبَ عَلَيْهِمْ. وَقَدْ ذَكَرَ شَيْخُ الْإِسْلَامِ فِي كِتَابِهِ (دَرْءُ تَعَارُضِ الْعَقْلِ وَالنَّقْلِ) أَنَّ قَوْلَ أَهْلِ التَّفْوِيزِ مِنْ شَرِّ أَقْوَالِ أَهْلِ الْبِدْعِ وَالْإِلْحَادِ. هَذَا هُوَ الَّذِي يَقُولُهُ بَعْضُ النَّاسِ، أَنَّهُ مَذْهَبُ أَهْلِ السُّنَّةِ وَالْجَمَاعَةِ، وَهُوَ التَّفْوِيزُ، وَلِذَلِكَ يَقُولُونَ: أَهْلُ السُّنَّةِ قِسْمَانِ: مُفَوِّضَةٌ وَمُؤَوَّلَةٌ. وَهَذَا خَطَأٌ عَظِيمٌ، فَأَهْلُ السُّنَّةِ مُؤَوَّلَةٌ، وَأَهْلُ السُّنَّةِ مُفَوِّضَةٌ؛ لَكِنَّهُمْ يَأْوِلُونَ إِذَا دَلَّ الدَّلِيلُ عَلَى التَّأْوِيلِ، وَيَفُوضُونَ الْكَيْفِيَّةَ، وَأَمَّا الْمَعْنَى فَلَا يَفُوضُونَهُ. وَخِلَاصَةُ الْجَوَابِ عَلَى سَأَلِك: أَنَّ نَقْلَ: إِنَّ صَحَّ هَذَا عَنْ الْإِمَامِ أَحْمَدَ فَالْإِمَامُ أَحْمَدُ لَيْسَ بِمَعْصُومٍ، وَلَكِنِّي لَا أَظُنُّهُ يَصِحُّ

Meaning:

It is narrated from Imam Aḥmad, may Allah have mercy on him, that he said regarding the verse: "And your Lord has come" [al-Fajr:22], "And the command of your Lord has come." Some have cited this in one of their books and stated: The methodology of Imam Aḥmad is delegation [tafwīd], and that Imam Aḥmad – who is the leader of Ahl al-Sunna – resorted to interpretation [ta'wīl] in this verse. So, is this narration from Imam Aḥmad authentic?

First: This must be established as authentic from Imam Aḥmad.

Second: If it is presumed that he, may Allah have mercy on him, erred in this matter – which he does not affirm in the generality of his statements – this does not mean that he is infallible, and that his opinion must be accepted.



Third: You mentioned that he delegates [yufawwiḍ], and this statement in its absolute form requires examination, because delegation [tafwīḍ] is of two types: delegation of meaning [tafwīḍ al-ma'nā] and delegation of modality [tafwīḍ al-kayfiyya].

The People of the Sunna and Community (Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a) delegate the modality [kayfiyya], but they do not delegate the meaning [ma'nā]. Rather, they affirm it, establish it, explain it, and categorize it. **So, whoever claims that the People of the Sunna are those who advocate delegation [tafwīḍ] (meaning by this the delegation of meaning) has indeed lied about them.**

Shaykh al-Islam, may Allah have mercy on him, mentioned in his book (Dar' Ta'āruḍ al-'Aql wa al-Naql) that the position of the people of delegation [tafwīḍ] is among the worst positions of the people of innovation and deviation.

This is what some people say that it is the methodology of Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a, which is delegation [tafwīḍ], and therefore they say: Ahl al-Sunna are of two categories: those who delegate [mufawwiḍa]. And those who interpret [mu'awwila].

This is a grave error, for Ahl al-Sunna are both interpreters [mu'awwila] and delegators [mufawwiḍa]; however, they interpret [yu'awwilūn] when evidence indicates interpretation [ta'wīl], and they delegate [yufawwiḍūn] the modality [kayfiyya], but as for the meaning [ma'nā], they do not delegate it. The summary of the answer to your question is that we say: If this is authentically established from Imam Aḥmad, then Imam Aḥmad is not infallible, but I do not think it is authentic. "Liḳā' al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ" (67/24).

**Quotes from Imam al-Dhahabī:**

Let us now present exclusive quotations from the pen of Imam al-Dhahabī that manifest theological positions not in conformity with the methodological approaches of Ibn Taymiyya and contemporary Salafism, in affirmation of tafwīḍ al-ma'nā—the consignment of the true meaning of the divine attributes to Allah's knowledge exclusively.

Al-Ḥāfiẓ Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) has articulated his theological positions regarding the concept of Tafwīḍ al-Ma'na (delegation of the meaning of Allah's Ṣifāt) and his preferred methodology in his biographical compendium Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā' as follows:

A) 8/105:

فَقَوْلُنَا فِي ذَلِكَ وَبَابِهِ: الْإِقْرَارُ، وَالْإِمْرَارُ، وَتَفْوِيضُ مَعْنَاهُ إِلَى قَائِلِهِ الصَّادِقِ الْمَعْصُومِ

“Our position regarding this and similar matters is: affirmation [al-iqrār], letting it pass as it came [al-imrār], and **delegating its meaning [tafwīḍ ma'nāhu]** to its Sacrosanct and Truthful Sayer.”

B) Al-Dhahabī mentioned the following narration in his Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā' (5/449):

حَدَّثَنَا ابْنُ الْقَاسِمِ، قَالَ: سَأَلْتُ مَالِكًا عَمَّنْ يُحَدِّثُ بِالْحَدِيثِ الَّذِي قَالُوا: (إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَلَقَ آدَمَ عَلَى صُورَتِهِ) فَأَنْكَرَ ذَلِكَ إِنْكَارًا شَدِيدًا، وَنَهَى أَنْ يَتَحَدَّثَ بِهِ أَحَدٌ

“Ibn al-Qāsim narrated to us, saying: I asked Mālik about those who narrate the hadith which they report as: "Indeed Allah created Adam in His image (ṣūra)." He rejected this severely and forbade anyone from narrating it.”

Then after some discussion he said the following about the above hadith(5/550):

فَهَذَا الصَّحِيحُ مُخَرَّجٌ فِي كِتَابِي (الْبُخَارِيُّ) وَ(مُسْلِمٍ). فَنُؤْمِنُ بِهِ، وَنُفَوِّضُ، وَنُسَلِّمُ، وَلَا نَخُوضُ فِيهَا لَا يَغْنِيْنَا، مَعَ عَلَمِنَا بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ، وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ.

“This authentic [hadith] is recorded in the two books of al-Bukhārī and Muslim. So, we believe in it, we **delegate [nufawwid]**, we submit, and we do not delve into what does not concern us, with our knowledge that Allah – there is nothing like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing.”

Al-Dhahabī also commented on the above narration in his Mīzān al-I‘tidāl (2/420) by saying:

أما معنى حديث الصورة فنرد علمه إلى الله ورسوله ونسكت كما سكت السلف مع الجزم بأن الله ليس كمثل شئ

**“As for the meaning [ma‘nā] of the hadith of the form [ṣūra], we leave its knowledge to Allah and His Messenger** and remain silent as the Salaf remained silent, while firmly asserting that Allah—there is nothing like unto Him.”

C) Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’ (14/373-374):

قُلْتُ: مَنْ أَقَرَّ بِذَلِكَ تَصَدِّقًا لِكِتَابِ اللَّهِ، وَلَا حَادِثًا رَسُولِ اللَّهِ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - وَآمَنَ بِهِ مُفَوِّضًا مَعْنَاهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ، وَلَمْ يَخُضْ فِي التَّأْوِيلِ وَلَا عَمَقَ، فَهُوَ الْمُسْلِمُ الْمُتَّبِعُ، وَمَنْ أَنْكَرَ ذَلِكَ، فَلَمْ يَدْرِ بِثَبُوتِ ذَلِكَ فِي الْكِتَابِ وَالسُّنَّةِ، فَهُوَ مُقَصِّرٌ وَاللَّهُ يَعْفُو عَنْهُ، إِذْ لَمْ يُوجِبِ اللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ حِفْظَ مَا وَرَدَ فِي ذَلِكَ، وَمَنْ أَنْكَرَ ذَلِكَ بَعْدَ الْعِلْمِ، وَفَقَا غَيْرَ سَبِيلِ السَّلَفِ الصَّالِحِ، وَتَمَعَّلَ عَلَى النَّصِّ، فَأَمَرَهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ، نَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الضَّلَالِ وَالْهَوَى

“I say: Whoever affirms this in verification of the Book of Allah and the hadiths of the Messenger of Allah – may Allah bless him and grant him peace – and believes in it while **delegating its meaning [mufawwidan ma‘nāhu] to Allah and His Messenger**, and does not delve into interpretation nor probe deeply, then he is the true following Muslim. And whoever denies this but was unaware of its establishment in the Book and the Sunna, is negligent, and

Allah pardons him, since Allah has not obligated every Muslim to memorize what has been reported regarding this. And whoever denies this after having knowledge, follows a path other than that of the righteous predecessors [al-Salaf al-Sāliḥ], and indulges in speculation about the text, then his affair is left to Allah. We seek refuge in Allah from misguidance and whims.”

D) Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’ 14/374:

وَلَا بُنْ حُرَيْمَةَ عَظَمَةٌ فِي النُّفُوسِ، وَجَلَالَةٌ فِي الْقُلُوبِ؛ لِعِلْمِهِ وَدِينِهِ وَاتِّبَاعِهِ السُّنَّةَ  
وَكِتَابِهِ فِي (التَّوْحِيدِ) مُجَلَّدٌ كَبِيرٌ، وَقَدْ تَأَوَّلَ فِي ذَلِكَ حَدِيثَ الصُّورَةِ

“Ibn Khuzayma has great stature in the souls and reverence in the hearts, due to his knowledge, religiosity, and following of the Sunna. His book on (Tawḥīd) is a large volume, and in it he (figuratively) interpreted (Ta’wīl) the hadith regarding the image.

فَلْيَعْذُرْ مَنْ تَأَوَّلَ بَعْضَ الصِّفَاتِ، وَأَمَّا السَّلَفُ، فَمَا خَاضُوا فِي التَّأْوِيلِ، بَلْ آمَنُوا وَكَفُوا، وَفَوَّضُوا عِلْمَ ذَلِكَ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ، وَلَوْ أَنَّ كُلَّ مَنْ أَخْطَأَ فِي اجْتِهَادِهِ – مَعَ صِحَّةِ إِيْمَانِهِ، وَتَوَخُّيهِ لِاتِّبَاعِ الْحَقِّ – أَهْدَرْنَا، وَبَدَّعْنَاهُ، لَقَلَّ مَنْ يَسْلُمُ مِنَ الْأَئِمَّةِ مَعَنَا، رَحِمَ اللَّهُ الْجَمِيعَ بِمَنِّهِ وَكَرَمِهِ

So let there be excuse for one who interpreted [ta’awwala] some of the attributes. As for the predecessors (Salaf), they did not delve into interpretation [al-ta’wīl], but rather believed, refrained [from speculation], **and delegated [fawwadū] the knowledge of that to Allah and His Messenger,** and if we were to disregard and declare innovation against everyone who erred in his independent reasoning [ijtihādihi] – despite the soundness of his faith and his striving to follow the truth – few of the Imams would remain safe with us. May Allah have mercy on all of them by His favour and generosity.”

Al-Dhahabī did know of evidence for performing interpretative exegesis [Ta’wīl] when necessary as he authenticated such a text in his Talkhīṣ al-

Mustadrak (see below). One may refer to the following article for analysis –  
**Ta'wil of 'Saaq' from Ibn Abbas:**  
<https://archive.org/details/TawilOfTheSaaqFromIbnAbbasra>

Al-Bayhaqī (384-458 AH) mentioned in his al-Sunan al-Kubrā (21/202) the following which indicates proof for non-literal interpretation (ta'wil) when the necessity arises:

أَخْبَرَنَا أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ الْخَافِظُ وَأَبُو سَعِيدِ ابْنِ أَبِي عَمْرٍو قَالَا: حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو الْعَبَّاسِ، حَدَّثَنَا أَحْمَدُ بْنُ عَبْدِ الْجَبَّارِ، حَدَّثَنَا وَكَيْعٌ، - ٢١١٦٤ -  
عَنْ أُسَامَةَ بْنِ زَيْدٍ، عَنْ عِكْرِمَةَ، عَنْ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ قَالَ: إِذَا قَرَأَ أَحَدُكُمْ شَيْئًا مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ فَلَمْ يَدْرِ مَا تَفْسِيرُهُ فَلْيَلْتَمِسْهُ فِي الشِّعْرِ؛ فَإِنَّهُ دِيْوَانُ  
الْعَرَبِ.  
هَذَا هُوَ الصَّحِيحُ مُوقُوفٌ

“21164 - Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥāfiẓ and Abū Sa‘īd ibn Abī ‘Amr informed us, saying: Abū al-‘Abbās narrated to us, Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Jabbār narrated to us, Wakī‘ narrated to us, from Usāma ibn Zayd, from ‘Ikrima, from Ibn ‘Abbās who said: **“When one of you reads something from the Qur'an and does not know its interpretation [tafsīr], let him seek it in poetry, for it is the register [dīwān] of the Arabs.”** This is the authentic [Ṣaḥīḥ] version, stopped [at Ibn ‘Abbās].”

Al-Dhahabī mentioned this narration in his Al-Muhadhdhab fī Ikhtisār al-Sunan al-Kabīr (8/4260, no. 16307) and did not oppose the grading of al-Bayhaqī.

Al-Bayhaqī's teacher was Abū ‘Abdullāh al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī (d. 405 AH) who mentioned the following lengthier version in his Mustadrak al-Ḥākim (2/499-500):

**3845-** حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو زَكْرِيَّا الْعَنْبَرِيُّ ، حَدَّثَنَا الْحُسَيْنُ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ الْقَبَائِيُّ ، حَدَّثَنَا سَعِيدُ بْنُ يَحْيَى الْأَمْوِيُّ ، حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ  
بْنُ الْمُبَارَكِ ، أَنَبَا أُسَامَةُ بْنُ زَيْدٍ ، عَنْ عِكْرِمَةَ ، عَنْ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ ، أَنَّهُ سُئِلَ عَنْ قَوْلِهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ : {يَوْمَ

يُكْشَفُ عَنْ سَاقٍ { قَالَ : إِذَا خَفِيَ عَلَيْكُمْ شَيْءٌ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ فَابْتَغُوهُ فِي الشِّعْرِ ، فَإِنَّهُ دِيْوَانُ الْعَرَبِ أَمَّا سَمِعْتُمْ قَوْلَ الشَّاعِرِ :  
 اصْبِرْ عَنَاقَ إِنَّهُ شَرُّ بَاقٍ ..... قَدْ سَنَّ قَوْمَكَ ضَرْبُ الْأَعْنَاقِ  
 وَقَامَتِ الْحَرْبُ بِنَا عَنْ سَاقٍ  
 قَالَ ابْنُ عَبَّاسٍ : هَذَا يَوْمُ كَرْبٍ وَشِدَّةٍ.  
 هَذَا حَدِيثٌ صَحِيحٌ الْإِسْنَادِ وَهُوَ أَوَّلَى مِنْ حَدِيثِ رُؤْيٍ عَنْ ابْنِ مَسْعُودٍ بِإِسْنَادٍ صَحِيحٍ لَمْ أَسْتَجِزْ رِوَايَتَهُ فِي هَذَا الْمَوْضِعِ

Meaning:

“3845- Abū Zakariyyā al-'Anbarī narrated to us, al-Ḥussain ibn Muḥammad al-Qabbānī narrated to us, Sa'īd ibn Yaḥyā al-Umawī narrated to us, 'Abdullāh ibn al-Mubārak narrated to us, Usāma ibn Zayd informed us, from 'Ikrima, from Ibn 'Abbās, may Allah be pleased with them both, that he was asked about the saying of the Mighty and Majestic: {On the Day when the shin [sāq] will be uncovered}. He said: "When something from the Qur'an is obscure to you, then seek it in poetry, for it is the register of the Arabs [dīwān al-'Arab]. Have you not heard the saying of the poet:

'Be patient 'Anāq, indeed it is an enduring evil... Your people have established the striking of necks,

And the war has risen with us on a leg [sāq] (meaning in severity)""

Ibn 'Abbās said: "This is a day of distress and severity."

This hadith has an authentic chain of transmission, and it is preferable to a hadith reported from Ibn Mas'ūd with an authentic (ṣaḥīḥ) chain of transmission, which I do not permit myself to narrate in this context.”

Al-Dhahabī said in his *Talkhīṣ al-Mustadrak* (2/500) that the above narration is Ṣaḥīḥ (authentic), thus agreeing with al-Ḥākim's authentication.

## **Conclusion**

The textual evidence examined in this study demonstrates that Imam al-Dhahabī's theological methodology regarding the divine attributes represents an authentic continuation of the approach established by Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, particularly through his consistent implementation of *tafwīḍ al-maʿnā*. This methodological continuity stands in stark contrast to the theological innovations introduced by Ibn Taymiyya and subsequently amplified by contemporary Salafi writers, who have endeavoured to redefine the classical Sunni approach by rejecting *tafwīḍ al-maʿnā* despite substantial textual evidence supporting its authenticity.

The pronounced divergence between al-Dhahabī's historically substantiated theological framework and Ibn Taymiyya's revisionary approach highlights a significant methodological rupture, thus necessitating a re-evaluation of contemporary claims regarding the legitimate inheritors of the methodology of the early Muslim authorities (Salaf).

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